

the other hand, the very poor have to put up with the cheapest meat they can get. They are only too glad to get Argentine or Australian mutton at 4d. or 4½d., and will take that in preference to the better New Zealand at 1½d. or 2d. per pound higher. It is the middle class in which our customers are for the most part found. There is a very large class rich enough to afford to have palatable meat, yet not so rich but that they are glad enough to get it at 6d. instead of 10d. per pound. People in this class will not knowingly buy River Plate or Australian mutton. They will eagerly buy New Zealand mutton or lamb if they can depend upon getting it, and will pay anything up to 7d. or 7½d. per pound quite cheerfully. Upon these customers butchers are continually trying to palm off inferior meat from the Plate and Australia. The result is that many of them come to believe that New Zealand mutton is of very unequal merit, and that much of it is coarse, dry, and unpleasant; so they give it up.

In my opinion, though our trade has suffered and may possibly still suffer from selling the pick of our meat as English and Scotch, because that deprives us of the good advertisement that this excellent meat would be to us, still, any injury so caused is merely trifling compared to the harm that is done by fraudulent sales of River Plate and Australian mutton under our name. The meat-marking law, so far from injuring us, would, I think, be a positive advantage to us, provided frozen meat had all to be branded with some special mark denoting the country of its origin. It is not expected, however, that such a law will pass the English Parliament, although a Bill of the kind has lately for the second or third time passed its second reading and come in for some public notice. You would no doubt find great opposition to any such Bill amongst persons concerned in the imported-meat trade here. But then the opinions of these gentlemen should be taken with very considerable reservation on this point. Many of them are interested quite as much, or more, in Australian as in New Zealand produce; while some, of course, are concerned in the Argentine. I do not mean to suggest that the agents and the larger dealers here do not do their best for the producers; but in a recent speech by the chairman of an agency company occurs this very true passage: "For the future, it ought not to matter much to this company what price New Zealand mutton goes to in London." That being so, the sheep-owner to whom it does matter—very much—had better bestir himself to keep a close eye on his interest here.

I cannot help thinking that what is wanted is to secure dealers and retailers who will not touch either Australian or River Plate mutton, but confine themselves solely to New Zealand. Then the superior qualities and separate virtues of New Zealand meat ought to be systematically and widely advertised. It is all very well for dealers in Australian and Argentine meat to wish to lie low, and let the retailers smuggle their meat into the market by such means as they may like to employ; but it will not do for New Zealand to connive at or share in this policy. Quality, and quality only, enables and will enable our meat to hold its own against its cheaper competitors. The main desiderata, then, are: (1) That the quality should be rigorously preserved; (2) that it should be advertised widely and perseveringly amongst the English middle classes; (3) that efforts should be made by which the wholesale dealers should supply New Zealand meat to retail butchers who will agree to buy no other foreign meat; (4) that all foreign meat should be marked not only as foreign but with the country of its origin.

Moreover, there is Mr. Cameron's proposal for the opening of stores in different provincial centres. A memorandum from him describes this at length. Such stores would, no doubt, do excellent service. The question is, Who is to find the capital and organizing ability? I quite agree with Mr. Cameron that New Zealand meat is not nearly so thoroughly and widely distributed as many New Zealanders imagine. They are deceived by the amount of meat sold over the United Kingdom as "New Zealand," but which is not New Zealand.

No doubt you would find very few persons in the trade here who would unreservedly support the above programme. They would give you all sorts and kinds of reasons against it. No doubt some of these reasons would be good, in so far as they would show the difficulties in the way, but none of the reasons would really touch the true difficulty. This is, that the imported-meat trade in this country is very largely based either upon downright fraud or else on playing off one kind of foreign meat against another. Of course this process is extremely profitable to the dealers, but it is injurious to the producer at our end and to the consumer here.

I do not think many persons interested in the trade are anxious for Government interference or Government help. They know, of course, that the one object of the New Zealand Government would be to get the highest price for the grower, and the best possible advertisement for New Zealand meat, as distinguished from all other meats. The dealers, large and small, however, need care little about the growers. So far, too, from desiring that New Zealand meat should be recognised by the public here as the only first-class foreign meat, they are nearly all of them, more or less, directly interested the other way. My own suspicion is that the wholesale people dabble nearly as much as the retailers in either Australian or Argentine meat, to say nothing of North American beef; and in this matter, what is true of meat is true of dairy produce. But in the case of butter and cheese there is good excuse, because the Australian and Canadian article is usually as good as ours.

The system pursued for pushing frozen meat in the provinces does not touch the question of the use made by dealers of Argentine and Australian meat, nor does it to any great extent reach the small middle-class consumer who buys by the joint. We are too dependent on London and London men.

Before quitting the subject of meat there are still one or two important points. The storage accommodation here is not what it should be. At the present moment I hear complaints that it is not sufficient, and there is positive difficulty in getting room for arriving cargoes. Then, it appears to be of unequal quality. Some stores could not be improved upon, others are not as good. Then there is the old difficulty about slow discharge and the handling of carcasses in the docks. I do not see how any reasonable man can doubt the very great advantage that a large central sorting-shed in the docks would be to the trade generally.